"*Hermano* Entrepreneurs!"
Constructing a Latino Diaspora across the Digital Divide

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ABSTRACT: This article examines a United Nations "Digital Diaspora" project whose goal was to bridge the "digital divide" between the U.S. and Latin America. The project sought to mobilize a diasporic community of elite Latino entrepreneurs and U.S. technology industry representatives in order to repatriate knowledge and technology to grassroots community development projects in Latin America. The project organizers framed this approach as a means of extending and systematizing the long-standing practice of transnational remittance flows between kin. I discuss how the initiative reconfigured development as the moral responsibility of diasporic community members, both individually and collectively, rather than as the obligation of Latin American states. Furthermore, I question the complex identity politics that emerged from this project's efforts to mobilize "Latino" as a diasporic identity connected to Latin America, rather than as a product of U.S. cultural politics. This approach provides important insights into how the "Digital Diaspora" reconstitutes national borders and class identities even as it attempts to bridge the digital divide between development haves and have-nots. [Keywords: development, identity politics, Latino diaspora, class, technology, neoliberalism]

On a balmy September morning in 2003, I arrived at the United Nations Headquarters in New York to attend the launching of an innovative development initiative. This invitation-only event was advertised as a novel effort to promote "the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals through mobilizing the technological, entrepreneurial, and professional expertise and resources of Diaspora networks."[1] Based on the successful experience of an Indian initiative in 2000, followed by a project for Africa commencing in 2002, this newest so-called Digital Diaspora project had its sights set on Latin America and the Caribbean. In an effort to bridge the technology gap—referred to here as the "digital divide"—between North and South, the program aspired to increase the direct flow of knowledge and resources between U.S.-based Latino entrepreneurs and community development projects in Latin America. The kick-off event was to be attended by a diverse array of business executives, diplomats, consultants, non-governmental organization representatives, information technology experts, and a handful of academics that had an interest in building this initiative from the ground up.

I came to the meeting with the dual interest of commencing research on the proposed development plan and encountering the pan-Latino diaspora through which the project was to be enacted. As a blonde-haired, blue-eyed Mexican-American from California, I was more than familiar with the complexity of Latino identity politics and, thus, should not have been surprised by the lack of "physical evidence" of such a Latino community at the event. Nonetheless, I was taken aback when less than half of the attendees appeared to be Latinos; abundant instead were non-Latino representatives from Microsoft, Verizon, Intel, and various other technology and communications companies. My puzzlement grew when program organizers confirmed my demographic assessment of the Latino absence. Where was the Latino diaspora, I wondered? More importantly still, what did the absence of Latinos at this inaugural event imply about the presumed identities and relationships upon which this new project was founded?

This paper analyzes the Digital Diaspora for Latin America project with a focus on the contemporary development context out of which it emerged and the transnational identity politics on which it was premised. Through an ethnographic analysis of the inaugural event, I explore the basic development assumptions that underwrote this

initiative. I identify these assumptions as "neoliberal" because of the way they promoted development through market-based rationalities that privileged individual responsibility, social enterprise, and post-national economic and technological integration. These assumptions oriented the initiative's efforts to harness elite, expatriate knowledge and capital for regional development—a task whose ultimate goal was to continue the transfer of development responsibility from Latin American states to private individuals. Rather than seeing this shift as evidence of a "retreat" of the state from development, however, I use the inaugural experience to illustrate the continued importance of the Latin American state in shaping transnational development practices.

The significance of this neoliberal shift is not limited to an analysis of development policy or to its potential economic impact. Indeed, what is most interesting about this project is the way that it used the notion of a Latino diaspora to recruit Latino elites to such a transnational development strategy. My analysis of the inaugural event, thus attempts to illuminate how the project conjured the notion of a Latino diaspora tied to a post-national Latin American homeland as the basis for a transfer of development responsibility. I show how organizers drew on assumed transnational filial obligations and the emancipatory potential of market expansion to highlight moral links among diasporic subjects. This approach elided the production of "Latino" as a product of U.S. cultural politics and effaced the ongoing importance of class and national identities within Latino identity politics.

In what follows, I provide a brief background on the Digital Diaspora phenomenon to reveal its philosophical and institutional underpinnings. I highlight the constitutive role of overlapping networks of expert knowledge, neoliberal rationalities, and diasporic identities in constructing transnational technology-based development initiatives. Through an ethnographic analysis of the Digital Diaspora for Latin America inaugural event, I show how these networks, identities, and technologies were mobilized as a potential way of bridging the digital divide. In the conclusion, I discuss some of the theoretical and political implications of these efforts and the new kinds of development strategies and subjects that they make visible.

The Digital Diaspora Concept:

The Digital Diaspora networks were the product of a series of initiatives created by a Seattle-based development organization, Digital Partners, and the United Nations Information and Communication Technologies (UNICT) Task force. They reflect a growing international focus on technology as a crucial measure of and tool for addressing development inequalities globally.[2] Originally, the Digital Diaspora projects at issue here sought to "bring together qualified members of the Diaspora—high-tech professionals, entrepreneurs, and business leaders—into a network with their counterparts in order to promote ICT-for-development initiatives in their home country" (UNICT 10). The goal of these initiatives was to capitalize on the technological expertise and humanitarian impulse of diasporic professional communities in the United States in order to address what many saw as a proliferating technology gap between those with access to crucial information technologies and those without. This technology gap became defined as the "digital divide" and, while the notion is now often used to reference technology gaps between many different types of constituencies (among class and ethnic groups in the

U.S., for example), the Digital Diaspora projects in particular arose out the desire to address the chasm between the United States and developing nations specifically.[3]

The Digital Diaspora projects were modeled after the IndUS Entrepreneurs (TiE) network—a partnership of South Asian technology industry professionals who organized a non-profit organization in 1994 to foster entrepreneurship and development throughout the Indian diaspora. That specific initiative attempted to build upon the "mix of a Silicon Valley culture of economic value creation through entrepreneurship and the ancient Indian tradition of Guru/Chela (or Teacher/Discipline) relationship."[4] The project thus mobilized identities born of a specific cultural context yet refashioned through a professional class culture and identity forged in the United States. Through these hybrid positions, the TiE venture hoped to provide mentoring and knowledge exchange between U.S. and Indian communities rather than simply charity. Digital Partners helped to mobilize a digital diaspora project for India in 2000 that built off of this template and tried to institutionalize its efforts on an even broader scale. The India-diaspora initiative and those that followed hoped to apply the successful two-way network method to other communities in order to promote "guidance and insight to make the [development] process sustainable" (personal communication, Akhtar Badshah, February 23, 2005).

The first project sponsored by the UN was the Digital Diaspora Network for Africa. This initiative emerged out of a series of serendipitous encounters between Digital Partners' CEO, Akhtar Badshah, and entrepreneur John Sarpong. The trajectories of these two men and the coincidental nature of their encounter are worth elaborating on, as they are illustrative of the way the Africa and, subsequently the Latin America, Digital Diaspora projects took shape. They also point to the importance of overlapping global networks of expertise and postcolonial identity politics as constitutive forces in diasporic development.

Akhtar Badshah was born in Bombay, India, and worked as an architect in both India and Sri Lanka before receiving his doctorate from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. After teaching at MIT for several years, he entered the field of community development and went on to work with numerous nonprofits (such as Digital Partners) even as he published on issues of development, sustainability, and information technologies. Currently, he serves on advisory boards for various international development initiatives including World Links India, World Corp., Teachers without Borders and Datamation Foundation India and has consulted for the likes of the USAID and the Rockefeller Foundation. However, his energies are primarily focused on his role as Senior Executive Director of Microsoft's Community Affairs Division. This history makes Badshah an internationally-known development expert both within the non-profit community and also within the larger development and corporate institutional environments.

John Sarpong, born in Ghana and a U.S. citizen, received his degree in Electrical Engineering from Yale and worked with several large U.S. corporations, including Boeing, before founding his own company, Africast.com—a "transaction-based service provider to the Global Africa marketplace" offering e-commerce and dynamic media services. The lead header on the Africast webpage frames these services part of an intimate personal relationship between diasporans and their homeland, reading "Connecting Africa worldwide. Visit your home country…Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya…."[5]

Badshah recounted for me how he and Sarpong met coincidentally in Harvard Square after both had gotten lost while looking for a nearby conference that they were to attend. Upon realizing their common plight, the two men went to have coffee and chat. It was during that conversation and several subsequent talks that the Digital Diaspora project began to take form. Badshah recalls telling Sarpong of his ideas for the project, noting, "But we don't have a champion." Sarpong cinched the deal by responding, "I will be your champion." As the Latin American case will later demonstrate, the existence of a project "champion," like Sarpong, turned out to be a crucial catalyst for the project's consolidation. Badshah and Sarpong enlisted a group of interested individuals "who were connected to networks" to construct the Africa project. They also recruited the UN—initially to support the inaugural meeting, but with the hope of receiving long-term funding—as it had shown great interest in the India project.

Both Badshah and Sarpong's individual trajectories as well as the circumstances of their collaboration reveal the kinds of transnational networks and expertise upon which the Digital Diaspora project hoped to build. As cosmopolitan subjects criss-crossing Ivy League locations, these men embodied the deep diasporic connections, the technical knowledge, the market acumen, and the philanthropic impulse that the diaspora projects sought to mobilize as the foundation for transnational development. Importantly, this combination of attributes implied not just the technical knowledge needed to serve as effective agents of transnational development; but also the moral incentive to view the development process as a cause to be "championed" by each of them as individuals.

The Africa project commenced in 2002 with the recognition of the new challenge constituted by working with a continent rather than a single country, as had been the Indian case. This move toward a continental or regional project signaled a shift in orientation away from the historic emphasis on nation-states as the primary object of development interventions; instead, it redefined development expertise and solutions relative to a different kind of development object, identified not by political boundaries but rather by the capacity for connectivity. The regional challenge was exacerbated in this instance by the absence of a strong technology background within the African expatriate community; however, the combination of UN support, an enthusiasm for information and communication technology (ICT) solutions, and dynamic "champions"—like Sarpong—with strong ties to their respective countries of origin made this project attractive.[6]

Digital Partners and the UNICT launched a Caribbean initiative in 2003; however, this project never really got off the ground. Therefore, when the possibility of a project for Latin America was raised, the project organizers proposed a joint initiative for Latin America and the Caribbean that would attempt to synergize relevant efforts in both areas. Badshah recalls that his organization was receiving increasing numbers of applications for projects in Latin America. This influx stimulated a desire on the part of Digital Partners to find people who could give both time and resources to projects that would confront computer illiteracy and the lack of access to ICT as an "increasingly powerful obstacle[s] to the economic, civic and political development of the region."[7] Representatives from several Latin American states also expressed an interest in making the project a reality.

In 2003, after the successful meeting of the African diaspora, Digital Partners and the UNICT sponsored an inaugural event for Latin America and the Caribbean to take

place. Due in part to Digital Partners' newness to the Latino context and also due to the rapidity with which this event was put together, the list of invitees to the event was not crafted with a well-established network of people in mind; rather the recruitment efforts "worked through a kind of snowball process that identified a somewhat random network of individuals, industries, academics" who could come together and talk about the project (personal communication, Akhtar Badshah, February 23, 2005). This snowball process drew me in as a result of my connection to a team of anthropologists at Intel Corporation who were studying the social dimensions of technology.[8] A research project I had recently conducted for them on the interface between social practices and information technology in Latin America garnered me an invitation to participate in the Digital Diaspora opening event.[9]

Inaugurating the Diaspora and Identifying "Us"

The inaugural event at the UN headquarters was divided into two different kinds of encounters. The first consisted of a series of panel presentations by diplomats, technology industry representatives, and expatriate leaders. The goal of these panels was ostensibly to share experience and inspire collective action on the part of the attendees. The second part of the day was devoted to working in small groups on case studies in the hopes of hammering out crucial issues that the project should address. Both of these activities provided unique insights into the tensions undergirding the project's working definition of the Latino diaspora.

The morning's activities took place in one of the large, arch-shaped United Nations meeting halls, with all of the attendants seated facing a stage with podium and cloth-draped table. As the room filled, successive waves of diplomats and development experts made opening speeches, followed by panels organized around diverse perspectives on the relationship between ICT and development in the region. Interestingly, despite the fact that this event was organized for the Latino diaspora, the majority of the talks were presented in English.

At several points throughout the morning, I could not resist the temptation of fiddling with the multilingual headphone system in front of me in order to listen in on the Spanish translation of the talks. The translator's Castillian, delivered with a thick Madrid accent, brought an ironic smile to my face, the European inflection seeming strangely out of place.[10] However, as I pondered this irony I began to ask myself what kind of Spanish accent would have sounded appropriate in this context. Had I expected to hear a Mexican dialect? A Venezuelan accent? While Spanish language has been cited as a common unifying principle among Latinos it is also a basic means of distinguishing among them (Suarez-Orozco and Paez 2002:7; Degenova and Ramos 7).[11] Therefore, the lack of a universal Latino dialect was not just a linguistic distraction on my part, but rather a core issue for this project in particular and for a changing American sociopolitical landscape more generally. In other words, it was the ambiguity surrounding the idea of *Latino*— who was included in that term and what kind of relationship to diverse U.S. and Latin American communities that person embodied—that both enabled and problematized the concept of a Latino diaspora as a potent transnational development agent.

Basic assumptions about who constituted the Latino community were immediately illustrated by the notable introductory remarks of project organizer Akhtar

Badshah of Digital Partners. He introduced his interest in the Latin America project by noting, "Many of us who live in the U.S. and come from other countries, have supported family or village through our advancements here. Information technology will help us to do that more efficiently." Badshah mentioned that this could happen through both the transfer of knowledge, what he called "mindshare" and the use of that knowledge to generate resources and effect policy change. He spoke eloquently of the power of both individuals and a collective to effect change, noting that the group must "harness the power of the network." His charisma was palpable and clearly one of the driving forces behind this initiative. Nonetheless, his comments immediately prefigured some of the important ways that neoliberal rationalities had shaped this project: first, in terms of a coherent transnational community—framed as "us"—that was connected to Latin America by virtue of moral obligations; and second by the injunction to harness the power of the "network"—a concept which conflated the development possibilities of internet connectivity with that of the diasporic transnational community itself.

Badshah's appeal to "us" was followed by another entreatment to the vaguely-defined yet presumably intimate transnational community of Latino professionals. In a video by José Maria Figueres-Olsen, the former president of Costa Rica and, since 2000, managing director of the World Economic Forum and special representative to the UNICT Advisory Group, further marked this exchange as a friendly dialogue among community members, explicitly directing his remarks at "those of us who have come out of Latin America." Figueres continued "many of our brothers and sisters…" would benefit from the information with which "we" are blessed. The route through which this would occur would require, among other things, that "all of us who are professionals donate our time to development," creating a multi-faceted network through which technology would be the "conductive arm of development."

At several points during Figueres' and subsequent presentations, I found myself looking around the room to sense how these personal appeals were resonating with the very mixed group present here. What did these supplications to "us" in the name of "our brothers and sisters back home" mean to the many non-Latino technology industry representatives here? How were they to sit with others, like me, whose academic and personal identities and interests had apparently landed them smack in the middle of an intense recruitment process? And why had this powerful Latino constituency invoked by the notion of "us" not materialized in a critical mass at this event?

In order to answer these questions, we must do more than simply examine the contours of the Digital Diaspora project discourse; rather, we need to explore the broader global context in which it was embedded. In many ways the working definition of Latino employed by this project—as a coherent cultural identity derived directly from Latin America—played upon the U.S. media constructions of Latinos as a homogeneous consumer group or niche (Davila "Latinos Inc" 1-4). This vision contradicted the production of Latino as a social category forged within the history of U.S. civil rights politics.[12] Furthermore, it elided the lingering importance of both class and national identities in structuring relationships both within the U.S. Latino community and between that community and Latin America.[13] Consequently, in the next sections, I ask how the context of neoliberal development and regional economic integration facilitated and in fact incited some of the ambiguity surrounding the Latino concept by both redefining

development as a translocal, collective project of self-care and reconfiguring Latin America as a post-national homeland.

Neoliberal Developments:

Since the 1980s, development strategies in Latin American have been defined by multilateral efforts to promote neoliberal economic reform and global market integration. While these efforts seemed to erase the state as the primary agent of national development, I argue that they simply repositioned the state in relation to other potential development actors and reinscribed state power through new forms of governance.[14]

In concrete terms, the economic austerity measures imposed on many Latin American states by global financial institutions during the 1980s required major economic and political reforms, to include lowering of trade barriers, promoting export-led production and foreign direct investment, reducing bureaucracy and social entitlement programs, and privatizating national industry, among other things. These policies were not solely externally-imposed, but also often driven by U.S.-educated Latin American technocrats who encouraged market-based solutions to the problem of development.[15] The economic transformations they prescribed were allegedly designed to restore financial solvency, promote economic efficiency and growth, and facilitate competitive integration into the global marketplace. Regional and hemispheric free trade agreements—i.e., NAFTA, CAFTA, MERCOSUR—were thus to serve as both the means and the end of regional development.

In the domestic arena, these reforms required state divestment from the top-down developmentalist policies that had dominated the previous decades, making room for laissez faire relationships between non-governmental organizations, grassroots groups, and international foundations. These new direct funding relationships reflected not only the effect of state decentralization, but also of the ascendance of participatory community-development strategies within global development paradigms. By working through local constituencies to create self-generated and self-sustaining development processes, these programs sought to be more flexible and cost-effective; in doing so, they also shifted the task of development from the state to civil society and the market.

While the above-described reforms clearly promoted a neoliberal economic agenda following market-based economic strategies, those logics were also extended to the redefinition of development subjects and practices.[16] For example, the shift toward bottom-up, community development was justified not simply as a way of making development more efficient, but also as a process of empowering and mobilizing civil society. Therefore, neoliberal economic and political reforms repositioned grassroots actors as agentive development stakeholders, rather than merely passive objects or beneficiaries of state policies.[17] Nonetheless, this emancipatory logic was rooted in a redefinition of participation itself. The new definition privileged access to and participation in the market, rather than legitimacy and voice within state politics, as the primary marker of empowerment. Consequently, many have argued that it was the emergence of new consumers and producers rather than political agents that constituted enfranchisement.[18]

Briefly then, Latin America's recent development context made possible important convergences between new economic policies, forms of governing, and

development subjects. These convergences wed rational, enterprising subjects and market-based participation and efficiency as both the means and ends of development success. They also conflated market expansion and emancipation, allowing global capitalist development to be viewed as a moral, individual process. Finally, they privileged direct translocal relationships among diverse development actors, thus diminishing not only the visibility but also the responsibility of the state within national development efforts. As demonstrated by post-development states globally, the process of state decentralization represented a strategic reconfiguration of its forms of governing rather than an actual dissipation of its power.[19] In the Latin American context, these shifts thus produced a re-territorialized vision of regional development that relied on private actors and the ostensibly liberatory potential of technology to effect development.

Turning to the case of the Digital Diaspora project in particular, we can see how these rationalities informed the initiative's conceptualization of why and how Latinos constituted the ideal constituency to bridge the "digital divide." First, the Digital Diaspora project reframed development as a moral endeavor that was the personal responsibility of individual diaspora members, rather than the state. As political theorists like Rose (1996, 1997), Dean (1998), Gordon (1991), and Burchell (1996) have noted, this move is characteristic of neoliberal rationalities that promote responsibilization, autonomization, and self-enterprise as central features of neoliberal governmentality. This framework allows for the repositioning of development subjects as "stakeholders," tied to the process of development through new definitions of morality and self-care:

> The neo-liberal forms of government…characteristically develop indirect techniques for leading and controlling individuals without at the same time being responsible for them. The strategy of rendering individual subjects 'responsible' (and also collectives, such as families, associations, etc.) entails shifting the responsibility for social risks such as illness, unemployment, poverty, etc. and for life in society into the domain for which the individual is responsible and transforming it into a problem of 'self-care.' The key feature of neo-liberal rationality is the congruence it endeavors to achieve between a responsible and moral individual and an economic rational actor. (Lemke "Birth of Biopolitics" 201)

In the case of the Digital Diaspora, project organizers validated this re-allocation of the responsibility for development self-care on the basis of a filial relationship among diasporic Latinos as individuals. By positioning Latino elites relative to their brethren, their *hermanos* in Latin America, this appeal redefined diasporic individuals as morally accountable for the development fate of their less-fortunate kin. Recall Figueres' entreaties to the Latino diaspora, worded as "those of us who have come out of Latin America" where "many of our brothers and sisters…" would benefit from the information with which "we" are blessed.

The Digital Diaspora organizers further affirmed the moral nature of the development project by conflating development's economic and social effects, linking market expansion to social justice. Take for example, opening comments at the inaugural event by Sarbuland Khan, an economist with the UN Economic and Social Affairs (ECOSOC). Khan noted that this project would work for "the construction of a universal

participative global information society network." He asked the gathering to ponder how this project could encourage "the public sector to draw on private sector creativity to cultivate market expansion and social justice." His speech redefined market expansion as complementary to or even enabling of new forms of participation and justice. This connection made sense because of the neoliberal assumption that participation and inclusion could be achieved through market consumption, rather than political agency. And it is this convergence that allowed the leaders of the project to reposition individual Latinos and as well as a collective Latino diaspora as personally responsible, morally compelled, and collectively capable of enacting regional development. This slippage between moral and economic goals also provided the many non-Latino technology and telecommunication industry representatives involved in this project with a way to justify their own collaboration in this project despite their lack of organic ties to Latin America. After all, by providing new possibilities for technology consumption, they would be contributing to new opportunities for both social and corporate enfranchisement.

Post-national Homelands

In addition to recognizing and mobilizing Latino professionals as powerful new development agents, the Digital Diaspora project's efforts also pivoted on a reinterpretation of Latin America itself. Rather than emphasizing national or subnational links as the source of Latino identity and, thus, the target of development interventions, the Digital Diaspora project *reframed Latin America as a collective diasporic homeland*. No longer simply Mexicans, Colombians, or Chileans, project participants were hailed as Latinos who identified with a singular, continental homeland. Consequently, at the heart of this project was the reconception of Latin America as a coherent, unified regional development object.[20]

What I find interesting and specifically neoliberal about this remapping of Latin America is the way that it enabled the emergence of not just a transnational Latino community, but ultimately a post-national one. By superseding national and communal identities, ICT-informed development hoped to provide a platform for regional and thus global connectivity. Building on an increasingly naturalized reality of hemispheric consolidation through regional free trade alliances, this definition assumed a transnational field uninterrupted by national borders or loyalties. Positioning itself in regional terms allowed the project to speak of free flows of knowledge, capital, and innovation between Latin America and the U.S. in a way that elided the role that diverse national, class, or ethnic distinctions might play in structuring those flows. The gaping "digital divide" between the U.S. and Latin America was the only real border that mattered here.

However, the production of a collective Latin American homeland was not significant simply for the way that it brought into view new development actors, transnational relationships, and spatial borders; it was also significant for what it erased—namely, states and private industry. This project's framing of post-national development possibilities worked to elide the ongoing involvement of states and also the profit potential of expanding Latin American markets for ICT products. Even as this project highlighted the ostensive withdrawal of the state from the realm of development, the fact that this event was sponsored by the United Nations—the official international organization of nation-states— and supported by Latin American state representatives

demonstrates the ongoing agency and influence of the state in shaping neoliberal development strategies. By mobilizing new types of development subjects—Latino elites—Latin American states sought to bridge not only a technology gap between North and South America, but also the gap in national development left by neoliberal economic policies.

The ongoing presence of the state was actively and somewhat ironically made clear at the end of the first part of the inaugural event. At noon, the event's transition from the plenary meeting to group roundtables was expedited due to the imminent arrival of President George Bush at the United Nations. Project organizers abruptly ended the panel presentations still in process and quickly shepherded us upstairs ahead of schedule. The sudden change in plan, our hosts explained, was to avoid being quarantined in the plenary hall for an extended period while President Bush and his security entourage passed through the building. This logistical dilemma provided a poignant, if somewhat comical, reminder that rather than replacing the state, transnational diasporic development efforts were designed to complement the neoliberal state's more mobile, flexible character, even following in its footsteps.

While the above explains the neoliberal premises behind the project, what remains to be explained is how this reformulation of development as a moral and regional diasporic project resonated with the extremely heterogeneous constituency recruited for the Digital Diaspora project. Who constituted the elusive Latino "us" that was personally responsible for the region? And how would this project inspire them to social action? In the following section, I return to the Digital Diaspora inaugural event to explore the contradictions that emerged from the identity politics proposed by this project.

Locating Latinos:

One of the central problems with this project was its effort to mobilize a U.S political identity—Latino—for the purpose of global capital development. Framing Latino in this way ignored the importance of class and race relations in the U.S. as an important means of structuring what it means to be Latino.[21] It also ignored the ongoing importance of national identity and local community as the most salient forms of belonging within diasporic configurations.[22] Therefore, by employing "Latino" to classify a very heterogeneous group of professionals (who may or may not have identified with that term) and recruit their development participation in Latin America, the Digital Diaspora project erased the complex, situated, and highly politicized nature of Latino identity in favor of working with what organizers saw as a coherent, essentialized cultural identity and, thus, consumer market constituted by an organic relationship to Latin America. More snapshots from the conference demonstrate why.

For the second half of the inaugural event, all of the nearly 200 participants were to begin collective work on actual case studies and program planning. In an elegant dining room overlooking downtown New York City, we took our seats around tables of approximately 10 seats, each marked with a nametag. The tables were organized to facilitate interaction among a variety of participant types for a lunch break-out session. Dining somewhat hurriedly on chicken, we were put to work according to explicit instructions:

The vision for this session is to offer the participants a glimpse of some of the ground-breaking ways technology is currently being deployed to address education, gender and entrepreneurship issues in Latin America and the Caribbean. Then to generate a discussion around a needs assessment for the cases…, resources available… and an action plan for implementing solutions. [Conference handout]

To my mind, the interesting part of this assignment was the following injunction, which immediately brought the problem of identity to the fore:

Since the meeting's attendees come from a diverse background of cultures, education, and professional experience, this session should offer innovative and fresh perspectives on development and the role *we can all play* in this revolutionary age of information technology…We hope this will act as a catalyst for people to begin to brainstorm ways *they* can contribute whether it is creating a mentorship program, social venture fund, information databases, in-kind donation clearing facility, etc. The result of the session should be a list of ideas of how *this diaspora community* can contribute to the advancement of Latin America and the Caribbean. [Conference handout; emphasis added]

The noted diversity of attendees was immediately evident at my table where I was joined by venture capitalists, web designers, another university professor, a technology industry researcher, a nonprofit organizer, and a representative from the Organization of American States. In addition to its professional variety, the group also represented a range of ethnic identities, including African American, South Asian, and European-American and two self-identified Latinos—myself and a Colombian-born, U.S.-educated lawyer/technocrat. Immediately, therefore, the way the instructions were worded created some confusion. About whom were we speaking? For whom were we planning? What role were "we" supposed to play in this process? This confusion necessarily structured the kinds of responses we had to the case studies we reviewed. As we discussed possible recommendations for how to expand inner-city Internet kiosks in Rio de Janeiro or women's handicrafts enterprises in rural Mexico we found ourselves asking questions about the *kind* of Latino diaspora to which these projects might be connected. Were we talking about communities comprised of working-class circuit migrants? Professional networks composed of solely expatriates or also including second- or third-generation Chicano/Latinos? Did all of these constituencies constitute part of one Latino diaspora or many diasporas?

The problem of how to define the Latino diaspora continued to manifest itself during the remainder of the Digital Diaspora event. As the various working groups came together after lunch to share results of their interactions and brainstorm next steps, it was clear that little in the way of concrete recommendations had resulted from the break-out session. If anything, the groups' efforts seemed to have generated more questions than answers. For example, the leaders acknowledged the difficulty their groups had had in effectively debating these issues and the ultimate impossibility of producing a formal policy statement at this juncture. Individual conference participants reiterated their confusion about who the main patrons and beneficiaries of these projects would be and

how they were positioned within a larger transnational Latino community. Furthermore, they questioned how the recruitment of information technology to these development projects would address diverse development needs. As one group representative noted, "Where are the grassroots groups to speak to their needs?" Her intervention acknowledged that even if this conference were to effectively represent the professional end of the Latino diaspora (which clearly it had not), no clear analysis of the diaspora could be performed without a perspective from the other end of the transnational community spectrum. Apparently, the heart of the Latino diaspora lay elsewhere.

Badshah moved to wrap-up the meeting by noting the selection of an advisory board to see the project through to the next step.[23] The newly-appointed board included a majority of Latinos (mostly executives with communications and investment firms), as well as non-Latino representatives from the technology industry. Heading up that board was to be Arthur Navarro, a Latino entrepreneur from the southwestern United States with a history of executive positions within the entertainment industry and the business world in addition to his current role as partner in Latin Communications Management, Inc.—a consulting firm that advises Fortune 1000 companies in the U.S. and Latin America. Navarro's entrepreneurial background was paired with ties to Washington through his previous position as White House Liaison to the US Dept of Commerce. One of the chief selling points of Navarro's selection as head of the board was his leadership role in organizing the communication industry's "premier" conferences—the Latin Media, IT and Telecommunications Conference. On the surface these experiences and affiliations appeared to mark Navarro as an appropriate choice; after all, his prominence within Latin media and marketing identified him as part of some of the most influential forces behind the emergence of a national Latino community.[24] Furthermore, like Badshah, he represented an actor embedded in diverse networks with cross-sectoral expertise. Nonetheless, his selection brought to the fore some of the central tensions over Latino identity and diaspora that this project encountered.

For instance, despite Navarro's important connections to the U.S. government and the Latino business community, his lack of connections with Latin American states and grassroots communities would, according to some, prove to be an important obstacle to the project's future progress. Navarro's activism on the part of the U.S. Latino community—including a "No Latino left behind" campaign—had primarily been oriented toward influencing U.S. state policy rather than on grassroots innovations in Latin America. In many ways, this work had been focused on closing a different "digital divide" than the one highlighted by this project—namely, a technology gap between ethnic and class groups within the United States. Consequently, while he was the only one to present himself as "the champion" of the Latin America Digital Diaspora project, his own Latino identity and politics represented a very different relationship to Latin America than the one the project assumed.[25]

At the end of the event, Badshah got up to deliver a final compelling plea to all of the conference attendees to essentially dig into their pocketbooks and begin the work necessary to get this project off the ground. The goal at this point was to set up a social venture fund to support the development of entrepreneurial activities that use ICT. Badshah noted that at the Africa Diaspora inauguration, once one person wrote a check, others came forward until there were start-up funds for the web portal.[26] An awkward silence and uncomfortable physical squirming followed Badshah's appeals here. No one

jumped up from the group to publicly write that first check. It was as if everyone assumed that he was speaking to someone else; and in some ways that was exactly true. Nobody felt implicated by the kind of personal, moral obligation that Badshah and the other leaders hoped to instill. One might say that the gaping divide here was cultural rather than a technological.

Conclusions:

The Digital Diaspora inaugural event reveals important tensions within this project's efforts to mobilize Latino identity for transnational technology-based development strategies. These tensions emerged from erroneous assumptions about who Latinos are and how they are, or are not, connected to Latin America. The lack of critical reflection explains why the Digital Diaspora project failed to connect with the Latino community that it had hoped recruit; however, rather than simply cultural blunders, these equivocations also reveal salient dynamics of transnational development strategies more generally.

The Diaspora project framed Latino identity as a diasporic byproduct of Latin America, imagined as a singular cultural and economic entity institutionalized in the global market.[27] This erroneous understanding of Latino identity was, in many ways, the product of U.S. media constructions that have repeatedly invoked *Latinidad* as a generic, cultural formation consolidated through Spanish language that could serve as the basis for a coherent consumer base.[28] This construction pivots on the notion of a Latin monoculture that transcends ethnic, class, national, or racial background, as well as North-South political borders. Latin America, conceptualized as a unified post-national space characterized by cultural homogeneity, market integration, and technological underdevelopment provided project organizers with what appeared to be a potent justification for cultivating moral and material linkages between U.S.-based Latino elites and their brethren back home in Latin America. The Digital Diaspora project hoped to harness this perceived Latino monoculture as the basis for regional development.

While Latino identity is certainly forged in conversation with Latin America, thinking of it only in terms of those geographical roots misses the historical contentiousness and subversiveness of this identity.[29] The Latino concept embodies a long historical conversation with Latin America; however, Latino identity politics in the U.S. reflects an explicit effort to create cultural citizenship for Latinos as a subaltern population in the U.S..[30] Latino is, thus, a U.S. invention rather than some natural, pre-existing regional category. As Eduardo Mendieta has poignantly commented, "For us, "Hispanic" and "Latino" are not a fate but a quest, a choice, even an alternative…We learn to think of ourselves through these imposed categories" (47). The affirmation of Latino identity is, therefore, part of a cultural politics that has sought to construct the terms of the Latino community's own identity (rather than having it defined for them in a pejorative way) in an inclusive way that integrates various racial, national-origin, and language groups. Consequently, Latino identity has emerged out of a struggle for social, political, and economic equality without assimilation to a dominant U.S. culture or homogenization into a singular Hispanic identity (Rosaldo 57; Flores and Benmayor 15).

Ironically, because of their class status, the Latino professionals recruited to this project were not the kind who would necessarily identify with this kind of subaltern

identity. The IndUs Entrepreneurs South Asian technology professionals—described at the beginning of the paper as the prototype for the digital diaspora project—provided one example of how national identity can be cultivated through professional class status abroad and then harnessed to provide a powerful transnational development platform. Yet in the case of the Latino professionals, professional class status in the United States has provoked some diverse identifications. On the one hand, middle- and upper-middle-class Latinos have tended to embrace the term "Hispanic" over Latino, a move associated with a more assimilationist and politically conservative identity in the United States (Alcoff "Latino v. Hispanic" 395). On the other hand, upper class, cosmopolitan professionals have tended, at least in some cultural spheres, to reinforce national identity as a way of distinguishing themselves from minority status within the U.S. (Davila "Latinizing Culture" 188-89). As an example of this latter tendency, after giving an earlier version of this paper a recent academic conference, a member of the audience approached me to complement me on my argument. She noted that her father—a Mexican professional living and working in Silicon Valley—would never identify as a Latino but rather would always identify himself to his North American counterparts as a Mexican national. Her comment implied that it was his class status that structured this nationalist identification. Therefore, it is not clear that Digital Diaspora organizers could have captured the kind of professionals they hoped through the rubric of a Latino diaspora in the first place.

Another contradiction in the Digital Diaspora's formulation of Latino identity is evident in the kinds of transnational linkages it imagined as essential to this diasporic community. The fact that Latino identity emerged as a product of U.S. identity politics certainly does not diminish what are for many Latinos deeply-felt and regularly reproduced connections to family and community in Latin America. Indeed, those intense forms of belonging often motivate and structure diverse and increasingly powerful transnational communities across the digital divide. Yet it was both this recognition of Latinos' intimate connection to place of origin and kin and the assumption of a singular, homogeneous Latino monoculture that informed the Digital Diaspora project efforts to promote a regional, post-national development solution.

Latino diasporas organized around national origin, town, or ethnic community affiliation have long been engaged in the kind of grassroots, entrepreneurial activities the Digital Diaspora project sought to inspire. Indeed, collective mobilization through hometown associations—which have effectively channeled remittances toward local development projects in rural and urban communities, especially in Mexico and El Salvador—was a model for the kind of organization sought by Latin America diaspora development project. Political scientist Manuel Orozco and anthropologist Beth Baker-Cristales are among a growing number of scholars who have studied the powerful economic and social impacts of hometown associations on migrants' communities in the U.S. and in Latin America. As their work shows, both development institutions like the USAID and also home states have been keen sponsors of this kind of transnational organizing because of the promising economic development possibilities they portend. With remittance inflows rivaling the combined total of direct foreign investment and official development aid to the region,[31] it is clear how significant the economic power of these migrant populations has become.

Joining both aspects of this analysis, we can see that Latinos' connections to local and/or national communities outside the U.S. do not ensure their automatic identification with a broader pan-ethnic Latino diaspora within the U.S., and may even work against it. In many ways, the consolidation of "Latino" as a cogent cultural and political identity within the United States remains tenuous as a result of the resilience of those same translocal identifications and obligations, as well as the diverse class positions along which they are stratified.[32]   While some scholars are optimistic about the possibilities for increasing affiliation with a pan-ethnic Latino identity and its potential political impact,[33] others are more skeptical about the possibility of transcending these differences. As Gerald Torres notes, "The pan-Hispanic idea is problematic because it requires those of us who were colonized by Iberian imperialists to begin, first of all, to conceive of ourselves as having an identity that overlooks or supersedes the various national cultures that give vitality to a specific ethnic identity" (156).

The question of how to define Latino identity thus parallels the translation process that I experienced at the Digital Diaspora event—namely, we may come to the earphones expecting to hear Spanish, but we might be surprised by the particular accent we encounter, as none can speak wholly and unproblematically for all Latinos. At the inauguration event, the thick Madrid accent I encountered seemed particularly out of place and even ironic, reverberating perhaps some of Torres' comment above. However, upon reflection, no other, single accent would have been wholly appropriate either.   This dissonance reminds us that both national and class identities remain a matter of great importance within the constitution of the Latino community and play an important role in structuring the kinds of alliances and identifications that are possible. Furthermore, the problem of translation alerts us to the stakes of both hegemonic efforts to construct a new consumer base and grassroots efforts to consolidate a Latino identity in the name of a coherent political constituency.   As Davila notes "The homogenization of a heterogeneous population into a single "Latino" market, for instance, while increasing the visibility of Latino populations coincides with larger processes of partial containment and recognition of ethnic differences that are at play in other spheres of contemporary U.S. society, such as political and social and cultural policies; in fact, it is an intrinsic component of such processes" ("Latinos, Inc" 8-9).

As the foregoing analysis makes clear, the digital diaspora project reveals the still-crucial role of class and nation-states in shaping the relationship between development and identity, even across a transnational diasporic community.   The questions that the Digital Diaspora project raises about the relationship between development and identity are, therefore, not exclusive to the Latino problematic; in many ways, they illustrate something more profound about the new forms of subject formation and transnational governmentality instituted by neoliberal development strategies. The Digital Diaspora represents an effort to mobilize a sector that the state has not been able to effectively capture for development—expatriate elites.   While neoliberal economic and political reforms would seem to have made the state disappear from the realm of development, the Digital Diaspora's efforts to recruit diasporic elites to the task of development demonstrate states' ongoing interest in shaping not only grassroots-level politics, but also elite actions. The UN sponsorship of the Digital Diaspora program serves as perhaps the best evidence of the states' interest in harnessing elite knowledge for national development.   Seen in this light, my title, "hermano entrepreneurs"

references the way this Digital Diaspora project repositioned Latinos as individually and morally responsible for regional development based on their Latin American roots and unique knowledge and skills. However, when we imagine the recruitment process that this entailed, we can imagine the appeal "*mi hermano!"* coming not so much from Latin American grassroots communities calling their Latino brethren home, but rather from state technocrats, hoping to entreat their fellow class peers to bridge the gap not only between North and South, but also between public and private development responsibilities.

Notes:

[1] Source United Nations Information and Communication Technology Task force (UNICT) http://www.ddn-latinamericacaribbean.org/. Accessed 10/15/2003.

[2] Evidence of this assumption is articulated in the United National Development Programme's Human Development Report entitled "Making New Technologies Work for Human Development". For a visual representation of the problem, see the cover of the March 2005 Economist, which features a young African boy holding what appears to be a rock to his ear, in the style of a cell phone. This Economist also features a critique of the internet connectivity focus of the digital divide conversation. "The real digital divide" The Economist March 12, 2005:11.

[3] See Lisa Servon for an analysis of social inequality and public policy relative to technology gaps both within the U.S. and globally.

[4] TiE official website. http://www.tie.org. Accessed 3/10/05. TiE is now an international organization with roughly 8,000 members worldwide, organized in 16 chapters located in the U.S., Canada, the UK and India.

[5] Africast, Inc. http://www.africast.com, accessed 2/15/2005. Later in 2005, the Africast.com webpage shifted from an e-commerce portal to a site emphasizing "Global Africa Network" media, including a pan-Africa movie channel for streaming and cable connection. John Sarpong remains the chairman and CEO, of Africast Global Media, Inc. formed in 2004, and of the Africast Foundation.

[6] The inaugural event for the Africa project established a Social Venture fund to provide financial support for entrepreneurial activities using ICT in Africa. Afrishare, "a platform for sharing best practices and matching innovative projects with mentors and potential sponsors" was formed.

[7] Source http://www.ddn-latinamericacaribbean.org/. Accessed 9/26/2003.

[8] Intel's People and Practices (PaPR) team is constituted by a group of social scientists working in concert with academic and private institutions to research diverse cultural formations globally with the goal of informing the development of new technology that corresponds to people's everyday needs and lifestyles. See more information at http://www.intel.com/research/exploratory/papr/

[9] DeHart n.d. "Latin America Area Survey: Interfaces between Social Practice and Technology." Research report submitted to Intel Corp.

[10] In Latinos, Inc, Davila notes the similar, ironic projection of Spanish film star Antonio Banderas as the face and voice of U.S. Latinos by Spanish TV network Telemundo (1).

[11] For more on the role of language, see works by Padilla and Zentella.

[12] For more on this history, see Gracia and De Grieff; Oboler; and Suarez-Orozco.

[13] Studies by Alcoff; DeGenova and Ramos-Zayas; Davila; Torres; and Bonilla all provide rich analyses of the way that class and national affiliations have destabilized the consolidation of a unified Latino or Hispanic identity and community.

[14] Julia Paley provides an especially astute analysis of this process as it shaped Chilean popular participation in the post-dictatorship period.

[15] Here I am speaking specifically about the "Chicago Boys"—the Chilean government team of economists who received post-graduate training in the United States at institutions such as University of Chicago or Harvard during the 1970s and, used the Chicago School of Economics principles to guide the decentralization of the state and the liberalization of the economy, deregulating the economy and privatizing essential government services. "Chicago Boy" influence was also evident in the neoliberal regimes of Mexico and Brazil, among others.

[16] In talking about how development produces new subjects and practices, I follow anthropological analyses which highlight how development constructs identities and enables new forms of governing, for example Jim Ferguson, Arturo Escobar. However, like more contemporary efforts in this vein, I have used ethnography to focus the specific ways that development identities are negotiated and contested by its subjects: see Donald Moore, Anu Sharma, Christine Walley, and Akhil Gupta for examples.

[17] For analyses of the relationship between state downsizing, trade liberalization, and privatization of industry and social services on the one hand, and the rise of identity politics and demands for grassroots autonomy on the other, see the edited volume by Alvarez, Escobar, and Dagnino and work by Alejandro Portes. See works by Julia Paley, Christine Keating, and Thomas Lemke, for a discussion of how participatory development models became the platform for new kinds of neoliberal self-governance strategies. Also, see Majid Rahnema for a critique of how this strategy essentially shifted the burden of development to the poor.

[18] Davila "Latino's Inc" argues that the emergence of Latinos as a "hot" item in marketing reflects Latinos' growing importance as consumers rather than as a powerful political constituency. Indeed, she notes,

[19] See Anu Sharma for an analysis of state development practices in India and Hoffman (forthcoming) for a discussion of the postsocialist state in China.

[20] This specifically neoliberal form of postnational Latin America can be distinguished from previous efforts to homogenize Latin America in the context of United States expansionist desires. According to Susan Oboler, 19th and 20th century narratives and policies constructed Latin America as a place of foreign others (relative to the normalized North) whose social status, race, and nationality was fused (18). See also Nicholas DeGenova and Ana Cecilia Ramos-Zayas for a succinct genealogy of the shifting significance of *hispanidad/latinidad* within the history of the Americas.

[21] Again, see DeGenova and Ramos-Zayas, as well as Suarez-Orozco, Oboler , Zentella, and Portes and Rumbault for studies of how these factors have shaped Latino identity politics.

[22] See Lionnet and Shih , Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc, Hall, Appadurai, and Chatterjee for further analyses of the role of national identity, minority politics, and community in structuring diasporic politics.

[23] These steps were to include establishing a web-platform for interaction between network members, holding a Digital Bridge annual meeting in Latin America, cultivating partnerships with institutions and corporations who could support the network, and establishing a Social Venture Fund to support specific projects. (Electronic communication to listserv, September 16, 2003)

[24] Davila provides a detailed portrait of how the US media and marketing have worked to cultivate the emergence of a U.S. Latino consumer niche.

[25] Lionnet and Shih's framing of the relationship between minority politics and transnationalism is a helpful resource for thinking through the complexity of diasporic and minority identities at work here.

[26] Elsewhere, Badshah noted that similar funds set up for the India and Africa networks have funded over two million dollars worth of projects (see Verdegal).

[27] Again, see Davila. Paulla Ebron also provides a compelling analysis of how Africa has similarly been constructed (and performed) as a singular political and cultural space. Her focus on the role of global capitalism and cultural commodities in producing "deep feelings" that mediate the relationship between African American "pilgrims" and their symbolic homeland is especially relevant to this conversation (190).

[28] See Davila "Latinos Inc" and Gonzalez, for further description of this process.

[29] See Maria de los Angeles Torres for an analysis of the evolving, but often tense relationship between Latino migrants and their home countries throughout the 20th century.

[30] While scholars have located the origins of the "Latino" concept in French imperial projects in Europe and Mexico, its salience as an anti-imperialist, political and cultural identity in the United States is of utmost importance here and in the larger Latino imaginary. See DeGenova and Ramos-Zayas, Rodriguez, Gonzalez, and Oboler.

[31] Source: Inter-American Development Bank. http://www.iadb.org/mif/remittances/.

[32] The preservation of translocal community identities is not simply an individual choice or the reflection of ethnic proclivities. Davila "Latinizing Culture", for example, has argued that multicultural policies work to perpetuate the reproduction of a focus on origins or nationalistic identifications as a means of evaluating "appropriate" representations of Latinness (181).

[33] See, for example, analyses by Edna Acosta-Belen or Mike Davis.

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